

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1-8, 11, 17-19, 22, 23, 25-30 and 61-64 were rejected over Katushiko et al. in the Office Action dated February 6, 2007. Claims 2 and 61 are being canceled herein. Claims 9, 10, 12-16, 20, 21, 24, 40-46 and 49-58 have been withdrawn from consideration.

The Examiner argued that Katsuhiko had an “annular member” (claim 1, claim 64) because the points 4 and 6 form an imaginary annulus. She argued further that the “annular member” was “continuous” (claim 61) because the points 4 and 6 formed an imaginary “pattern”, and the imaginary “pattern” was continuous.

In the Interview Summary dated January 10, 2007, the Examiner explained the rejection as follows: “[The] claim language does not positively recite structurally how the annular member is continuous....[The] annular member of Katsuhiko provide elements 4, 6, and 20 in a continuous pattern. It is noted, however, that these members do not form a continuous ring.” (Emphasis added.)

The applicants cannot agree that any reasonable reading of “continuous annular member” (claim 61) is readable upon the disconnected spaced-apart support members 4, 6 in Katsuhiko. Nevertheless, in order to expedite this matter, and in view of the new rejection over Koichi et al. (see below), applicants are filing an RCE with the present amendment.

Claim 1 is being amended to include the subject matter of claims 2 and 61 (now canceled). Thus, claim 1 now defines the annular member as being a continuous ring, and further recites more specifically that the annular member with the inner periphery thereof defines a processing width to be processed by the etching liquid. A related amendment is being made to claim 64.

In a telephone interview on June 27, 2007, the Examiner also indicated that the words “on or” in the last paragraph of claim 1 might lack support in the disclosure of the elected embodiment. The words “on or” are being deleted as unnecessary.

Thus, the last paragraph of claim 1 now states (emphasis added):

an annular member, the annular member being a continuous ring that has an inner periphery ~~on or~~ inside an outer periphery of the substrate and thereby defines, by said inner periphery, a continuous annular ring-shaped processing width to be processed

by the etching liquid on the surface of the peripheral portion of the substrate, with a gap at the surface of the peripheral portion of the substrate maintaining a continuous annular ring-shaped film of the etching liquid in contact with the annular member and with the surface of the peripheral portion.

The continuous ring annular member of claim 1 and claim 64, having an inner periphery inside an outer periphery of the substrate, clearly defines over the cited elements in Katsuhiko.

The Examiner also rejected claims 1-8, 11, 17-19, 22, 23, 25, 27, 30 and 61-64 over Koichi et al. (JP 07-122529). The Examiner cited the seal ring 20 as a "continuous annular member." Koichi et al. disclose a spin etching system that has a work holder 10, a seal ring 20, and a motor 1. A sample (semiconductor element) 300 is mounted on the work holder 10 and is sealed at the peripheral part thereof by means of the seal ring 20. Etching liquid is supplied to peripheral edge surface part 102A of the sample 300, thereby etching the peripheral edge surface part 102A.

However, the seal ring 20 is not arranged to define a processing width by the inner periphery thereof. Further, the seal ring 20 is not arranged to define a gap to maintain an annular ring-shaped film of etching liquid in contact with the surface of the peripheral portion of the sample 300. For at least these reasons, claims 1 and 64 after the present amendments are distinguishable from the teachings of Koichi et al.

For at least the foregoing reasons, allowance of claims 1 and 64 and dependent claims is requested.

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